

TEAM
WORK IN
PERSIA



Team Work in Persia

I. With the Native Evangelists in West Persia.



VERY Missionary in touring among Moslems will have some strange experiences, impossible in any but an Eastern land. Imagine the following interview anywhere else than in Persia. The missionary and his native associate were in the town of M., a hot bed of fanaticism, they decided to beard the lion in his den and visit the Mujtahid or chief Mullah of the place. This they did by appointment and found the venerable ecclesiastic in his reception room surrounded by a crowd of admirers assembled to see their chief "do up" the Christian preachers. Hardly had the usual salutations passed before he began, "Seeing you have come here to teach **us** your faith I wish to see whether you really know your own religion. Who was the first idolater?" Unfortunately neither of the preachers knew the Mohammedan tradition upon this

particular point, and frankly admitted that they had no information on the subject. "You don't know who the first idolater was? And you come here to teach us? Nimrod was of course. But I will put to you another question. What is Christ's law concerning the trimming of the mustache?" When told that Christ gave no instructions about the way one should wear his hair; that he was only interested in the state of a man's heart, the learned mullah broke in indignantly, "Certainly he had some law on the subject, and if you don't know that, you surely cannot teach us the greater things. I am not well today and can give you no more time. Go off and learn your own faith and then come and teach me." And so he dismissed us as he would have done a pair of school boys.

Once again the missionary and his companion found a group of village men squatting in a row on the sunny side of the street with their backs against a wall. They joined them with their Bibles under their arms; and soon the Missionary's companion was reading to them the Sermon on the Mount, which more than any-

thing else Christ spoke shows up the shams and petty formalism of Islam. But as he read, from every side came the persistent question, "That is all very good, but what do you think of our prophet and our religion?" At last not able to put off the question any longer the Missionary begins, "That is a very needless question; for if I believed in your prophet I would be a Mohammedan like yourselves. I am a Christian and if you wish to know why I am a Christian I will gladly tell you." Instantly bedlam breaks loose; an angry mob surrounds the preachers, and in the uproar such taunts as these are fired at them. "A man in our town after swearing falsely upon the Koran fell dead. The Koran killed him. Can your Injil do that?" "When they were building the sacred tomb at Meshed to the Imam Rizza the stones for the building got down themselves from the beasts of burden who brought them and walked up themselves to their proper places on the walls. Have you any sacred places to equal that?" "We do not have to be pure and holy to go to heaven: our Prophet is so mighty that he can

and will stoop down and pull us out of the hottest place in hell. Your Christ can't do that."

These same two preachers were in another town never before visited by Christian teachers. A captain in the army, who had in his military career lived in other parts of Persia and come in contact with foreigners, was the broadest-minded man in the place. He invited the visitors to his home for a tea drink; and while he was much interested in what was going on in the world he cared little for religion, frankly admitting that he drank wine, had too good an appetite to keep the Ramazan fast, and found praying five times a day with its accompanying ablutions too much work. Yet he had a priceless possession, which he showed us with great pride,—a shirt on which the whole of the Koran was beautifully written in almost microscopic letters. It had been handed down (unwashed of course) from his grandfather's or great grandfather's day, and it was a sure protection against any bullet; he wore it whenever he went out to battle. And while that man could listen without any resentment to anything you might say

about his prophet, it did hurt him to be told, no matter how kindly, that God's Word could do no one any good unless written on the heart.

Any one touring among Moslems must be prepared to meet with all sorts of ideas and arguments, from the unutterably trivial ones to those which are profound, and urged with all the keenness and subtlety of the Moslem theologians trained to debate. These, even the petty ones, often tax a man's ingenuity to answer; and while the missionary must ever try to avoid discussion and seek to present the positive truths of the Gospel to his hearers, yet he cannot refuse to debate at times; and an objection which may seem to him as trivial, may be a very real difficulty with the man with whom he is talking. It is in this respect that the native born worker so wonderfully assists and supplements the missionary. No matter how long the foreigner is in the country he never learns the language quite like the natives; nor can he wholly get their point of view and enter into their ways of thought. A man of the country even though he is not a convert from Islam, instinctively under-

stands what lies back of a question in the man's mind; or some veiled remark in village patois, wholly unintelligible to the missionary, is perfectly clear to the native born evangelist.

Here for example is the Rev. A.M.—a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary, but none the less born and brought up in Persia. He grew up side by side with Moslem boys; he spoke their language as well as he did his own, the Syriac. He is today the best preacher in Turkish in West Persia Mission, logical, simple, earnest and winsome, knowing just what are the weak points he is attacking and how to present the truth in the most convincing manner. His preaching power attracts many new faces to the Sunday services in the church at Tabriz; but his chief power is personal conversations with Moslems in their homes or shops, or with the callers at the Bible depot. Always tactful and unruffled he sticks to the main point no matter how often he may be sidetracked, — salvation through Jesus Christ and Him alone. Indeed seldom has there been so much encouragement and hope in

this branch of the work in the large city of Tabriz as there has been since he took hold.

Then there is Baron G—an Armenian, who is a man of a very different type. He has had but very little education; the most that he knows has been learned during his active service as an evangelist. His language is not the elegant diction of the Rev. A.M—but the village dialect; in that he is an adept. For years he has been most earnest and untiring in the work of evangelistic touring; few parts of the province of Azerbaijan have not been visited by him, and in many localities he has been the pioneer of the Gospel. He has had many thrilling experiences. Once he was in a town alone, the only Christian in the place. It was a town that was cursed with blood feuds and most of the men went armed. There in the city streets he was surrounded by a crowd, who demanded that he tell them what he thought of their Prophet. No temporizing nor evading the issue was permitted. "Was he a true prophet or a false one?" they demanded, as they brandished their guns. "Well since you insist" he shouted "he was

false." But before anyone could harm him, a young man completely armed sprang to his side, and exclaimed "This man has been brave enough to tell us what he thinks at such a time. Whoever shoots him must shoot me first." These years of service have been far from easy for Baron G—More than once he had had to spend a cold winter's night in the streets of a village too inhospitable to take a Christian in. Once in the middle of the night his host put him out of his house into the cold rain on learning that he was a Christian.

I am glad to say that work for Moslems is made a growing part of the course in our Theological classes. The students in addition to studying Islam by lectures and text books are expected to spend their week-ends under the superintendence of their instructors in missionary work in the Moslem villages and the many tea houses along the way. Rabi S—one of these students at Urumia in addition to his training has been my companion on a long and most interesting tour into more distant sections of Azerbaijan; and never have I had a more helpful associate. His zeal

never flagged; rain, cold, uncomfortable lodgings and hard experiences with the Mohammedans never daunted him. He loved most of all to take his Bibles to the bazaars to sell; and he would come back from one of these trips all aglow with enthusiasm over the opportunities given him to testify to his Master. Were I to make another tour I would choose him rather than anyone else I know, to be my companion; and I know that wherever he may labor, either as pastor of one of our Urumia churches or in direct work for Islam, he will never lose his deep interest in the evangelization of the Moslems of Persia.

But others, besides these and many other paid workers, are busy in this form of Christian endeavor. Let me give you one example, a woman, S—by name in the village of G—She is a member of that church and an untiring worker. Once after preaching in the church I asked for volunteers to go with me to some nearby Moslem villages. S—offered her services, and with some misgivings at going with a woman to such work, I at last ventured out. We visited that afternoon a number

of villages, and had audiences in each one. At first S—in deference to the missionary kept silence and let him do the speaking; but evidently she felt that he was talking over the heads of the village people, and so at last she asked permission to say a few words; and after that there was no more shooting high. She called a spade a spade with absolute frankness; but her frankness was well seasoned with salt and she held her audience through to the end. That night the missionary as he reviewed the work of the day realized that the best preaching had been done by the woman end of the team. This is only one incident of her many activities. Recently, since the great number of mountaineers have come as refugees to the plain of Urumia, she has taken those in near villages under her care. She visits them, helps their sick, sews for the naked, advises and scolds them like the children that they are, and preaches to them. They call her Kasha (Priest) S—and no one has a stronger influence over them.

The Missionary is needed for Persia, and for many years to come we must send an increasing force there if that country is to be evangelized; but I am even more sure that the larger part of the work must and will fall to the native agents; and the hope of Persia lies in multiplying many hundred times the workers, paid and volunteer, who spring from the people and know their ways as no foreigner can hope to know them.

R. M. LABAREE.

II. With the Medical Missionary in E. Persia.



IN JUNE, 1916, Dr. Joseph W. Cook of the Teheran station of the E. Persia Mission, started on an itinerating trip in the Elburz mountains, the point aimed for being 60 miles northeast of Teheran. With him was a native evangelist, a Bible seller and two servants. After several days of travel with numerous patients seen by the way, and operations for cataracts performed, the party reached Firus Kuh and pitched their camp in a garden by the river. A tent was loaned to Dr. Cook by the Governor and in this he and his associates lived and held the dispensary and operated for cataracts.

While there Dr. Cook was sent for to visit the governor of a place some seven hours distant over the mountains and perform for him a cataract operation also. The old governor was about 80 years of age. In his prime he had charge of all the Shah's horses and in this way had acquired great wealth. In recent years, when

the former Shah visited him and the Baktiaris came in pursuit, several hundred mares were taken and much property destroyed.

From Savat Kuh the home of the governor the party went to Simnon stopping a few hours at Abe Garm and bathing in the hot sulphur waters. At certain seasons 200 or more sick people congregate at these hot springs looking for cures of all kinds of diseases.

"It is my earnest hope", writes D. Cook, "to some day establish a little hospital in Simnon. It is a city of 20,000 inhabitants with perhaps 15,000 more in the dozen or so villages in the plain and mountains in the vicinity. The plain unfortunately lacks water so that enough grain and barley for the local inhabitants cannot be raised and supplies from the outside have to be brought in. The inhabitants of Simnon are simple and hospitable. All along the streets the men, women and children greet you with 'Salaam'. Foreigners are not looked upon as unclean, we were treated as brothers, taken into their mosques and holy places and allowed to eat from the same dishes as the Moslems them-

selves. This is all due to a Mullah or old priest, recently deceased. He was said to be over 100 years old, had ruled the whole district and was well known all over Persia. He had publicly declared that Christians were their brothers, had himself so treated Christians, and in fact at one time had asked one of our missionaries to preach for him in the leading mosque of the city. From that time Christians have been free to come and go in the mosques of Simnon. When Dr. Esselstyn who had visited him, said Goodbye, the old priest held out his hand and said—'In this religion of yours be steadfast, the right is with you'. The old man had a Bible which he knew well.

"Leaving Simnon we travelled over the same road on which Alexander the Great pursued Darius, 2000 years ago. The road runs due east over a desert which rises gradually to a pass and then drops into another series of valleys and plains where the country is more irregular and mountainous. Several times we had to get out and walk while the horses with great difficulty pulled the heavy canvas-covered wagon up through the sandy slopes.

"The leading native doctor of Simnon accompanied us and was with us for the following month, assisting us in every way and trying to learn, as he said, more about medicine.

"The second day out as we were driving across a hot sandy desert we saw a donkey with a woman and sick-looking child on its back and a man walking by the side. The doctor called out 'Where are you going?' 'To Simnon to see the foreign doctor', was the reply. 'Well, here's the doctor, turn around and come on to Denghan and we'll take care of him.' They had brought the child over 40 miles from a village down in the desert south of Sharood. We operated on the little fellow only five years of age, two days later and a few hours after he was carried away wrapped in dirty clothes and kept in a caravansari. Every day for eight days the report was circulated that the child had died, but every day, much to the surprise of us all the child was brought to the hospital and dressed and little by little recovered.

“The day before the operation the father had gone to the chief Kullah or priest of the city to ask advice. The priest, a sensible young fellow of 27 years of age said— ‘Well, the child will die anyway so you had better have him operated on and give him a chance.’

“Our work was watched in Denghan with a good deal of critical interest. The house we were in had been lent to us by a prominent man. It was his own house in the process of construction, bricks and lime were lying about in great confusion. The young Mujtahid the leading priest of the city and district was most cordial. He was suffering from neurasthenia so fortunately we were able to help him very much by advice and medicine, chiefly jollyng him until he forgot his troubles. For this treatment we received 50 tomans and his friendship. He with eight or ten other prominent citizens proposed giving 1200 Tomans and a house and garden for three years to our hospital with the understanding that within six months we should start work. A paper was drawn up and properly signed by the governor, chief priest and leading merchants and given to me.

“Denghan is the chief city of the plain in which it is situated and is famous for its pistachio nuts, said to be the finest in the world. It has a population of 12,000, and the 350 villages in the flat plains surrounding have a population of perhaps 30,000 more. Denghan has the reputation in consequence of its water supply and grain products, of being the richest city in all this province. In all this district there is no trained physician or surgeon. Two men practice but neither has had even the most elementary education.

“The hereditary prince of Mazenderan invited us to spend a few days with him investigating the needs of the mountain districts of his territory. His son had been a patient of mine in Teheran so he sent his own animals and servants to escort us over the mountains to his own home.

“We were his guests for ten days, but in spite of the hospitality we were at the beck and call of every one, especially the family of the hereditary prince and practical owner of this province. He is a fine man and his son too, but the many brothers and relatives are much like

the general run of Persian grandees. A number of patients were brought to us for treatment, and one an old man of 70 who was willing to have an operation but would not come, was brought by two soldiers. The old man had not slept for five months because of constant pain, but after working for an hour and a half amid a thousand difficulties we managed to relieve him of his trouble. Fully forty men and boys were waiting outside while we worked, several times the old man's pulse almost stopped, such bleeding I had never seen, but finally it was finished and I asked the crowd outside that they all pray for his recovery. A cry of 'En Shah Allah' or 'God willing' went up. Our prayers were answered and he recovered.

"After the operation the old man was carried to an adjoining room dark and dirty and was put on a thick piece of felt on the floor and wrapped in his own rags and blankets. I think every one expected him to die. I dared not hope much myself, but he improved

day by day and recovered his strength. After this our reputation spread widely and we saw scores of new people every day, many coming from the shores of the Caspian Sea and others from the mountains four or five days' journey away. The day I planned to leave an old fellow with a cataract in one eye, the other gone entirely, came, so I operated immediately and left. My Mirza who remained for several days, said he got a good result.

"Before leaving, Masudul Molk, the hereditary prince, gave me a letter promising to build and equip a little hospital and pay all running expenses provided I furnish a resident native physician for the four summer months, and spend one month of that time there myself.

"We were away seven weeks, treated about 3,500 patients, performed 130 operations and took in receipts amounting to 460 Tomans (about \$500 gold) which more than paid the expense of the trip.

"This to me is the fascinating side of medical mission work. I dare

say that nine-tenths of the operations we performed would have gone undone and the patients left to suffer indefinitely perhaps till death, had we not gone and hunted them up. I am equally sure that several of the patients had they been operated on in a hospital would have died. Why this is I do not understand but in the three years I have been on the field I have observed that many Persians do not do well in hospital surroundings. Separated from their friends, their customary food and surroundings, they wilt and die without apparent cause. But it is helpful to know that operations can be successfully performed on a touring trip."



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